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THE

## THEOLOGY OF PETER DENS,

WITH ALL ITS IMMORAL AND PERSECUTING PRINCIPLES, PROVED TO BE

## THE TEXT BOOK

OF THE PRESENT

## ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD OF IRELAND.

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AT such a period as the present, when Popery is making decided progress throughout the land—when its influence is felt in Parliament and in the councils of the Sovereign, and when a large body of professed Protestants entertain very light conceptions of its evil, and imagine it to be greatly changed for the better—it is exceedingly important to ascertain what is its true character, and what, therefore, we may expect from it in the future. But, important as such knowledge may be, it is of somewhat difficult attainment. Works on the Roman Catholic religion are very numerous, and some of them very large—many of them inaccessible to the general reader—and there is considerable dispute as to the amount of authority which is due to them. Unless we can appeal to an authoritative standard, all reasoning and discussion with Roman Catholics are comparatively vain. The ready reply is, that the Romish Church is not responsible for the opinions or the conduct of every individual in her communion. Hence the importance of a recognised religious standard, for which she is responsible; and such is Dens' Complete Body of Theology, as regards the Roman Catholic priesthood of Ireland.

This book was written by Peter Dens, Professor of Theology in the Roman Catholic College of Louvain, in Belgium. It is written in Latin, consists of eight volumes, and was published on the Continent towards the close of the last century. Till within the last few months, the book was altogether unknown to the Protestants of Britain. Though in wide circulation among the Roman Catholic priesthood of Ireland, it had been preserved in such secrecy, that its name is not to be found in the ordinary catalogues of the London or Dublin booksellers. No cross-examinations before Parliamentary committees, no religious discussions in Ireland, revealed its lurking place. Roman Catholic prelates, when examined on oath as to the standards of their Church, and regularly using Dens as a text-book in their dioceses, never breathed a whisper as to its existence, and that while referring to books as standards which are almost universally inaccessible and unknown.\* The discovery of Dens was quite accidental, or rather providential—the persons who were the means of bringing it to light not being in quest of such a work, and having no object to serve by its discovery. It has been wisely ordered in the providence of God, that, at the very season when the condition and prospects of

\* Of course *absolute* secrecy was impossible, otherwise the book would never have been discovered; but it was sufficiently guarded to hide it from Protestants for twenty-seven years.

Popery rendered an indisputable authority on the Roman Catholic system of peculiar importance to Protestants, it was brought under their notice, and has been widely proclaimed throughout the land.

1. The first point which we have to establish is, that Dens' Theology is a standard work, recognised and sanctioned by the Roman Catholic prelates in Ireland, and, consequently, that the priesthood and people are required to receive the sentiments which it contains, and the practices which it recommends. The steps of proof are few, simple, and conclusive, whatever extraneous matters may have been mixed up in the question by those who have an object to gain in blinding and misleading the public mind. Supposing there were a dark system of false religion which assumed the name of the true, and supported itself by superstition and intolerance, we would expect that in an age and country where knowledge and liberality were general, it would hide its most hideous features, and make great professions of freedom and improvement; while secretly, and among those whom it could trust, it continued to maintain and circulate its old principles. We need not wonder, therefore, at the course pursued by the Roman Catholic priesthood of Ireland in regard to Dens' Theology. Its concealed authority, yet active circulation, are just what, in the circumstances of the case, might have been expected. But how do we prove its high authority? First, Mr. Wyse, a Roman Catholic, and Member of Parliament for Waterford, states, in his History of the Roman Catholic Association, that the following resolutions were unanimously adopted in February, 1810:—

“1. That it is, the undoubted and exclusive right of Roman Catholic bishops to discuss all matters appertaining to the doctrines and discipline of the Roman Catholic Church; and, 2ndly, that we do hereby confirm and declare our unaltered adherence to the resolutions unanimously entered into at our last general meeting on the 14th September, 1808.”

Now, Mr. Coyne, the great Roman Catholic bookseller of Dublin, and publisher to the Roman Catholic College of Maynooth, who could have no motive to publish what was not true, and who should have been called to account, and censured or dismissed, if he falsely aspersed his Church or its bishops—Mr. Coyne, according to the acknowledgment of all parties, a most respectable and upright man, declares what the resolutions of 14th September, 1808, were. He proclaims, in his Catalogue for this year, that—

“At a meeting of the Roman Catholic prelates of Ireland, assembled in Dublin on the 14th of September, 1808, they unanimously agreed that Dens' Complete Body of Theology was the best book on the subject that could be republished, as containing the most secure guidance for such ecclesiastics as may, by reason of the peculiar circumstances of this country, be deprived of the opportunity of referring to public libraries, or consulting those who may be placed in authority over them.”

Here is the highest eulogium passed on Dens' Theology by the whole Roman Catholic prelates of Ireland. They select and set it up as the standard of reference—as *the best book on the subject*—as affording the *most secure guidance* for ecclesiastics; and to show that this is no idle compliment, Mr. Coyne states that he forthwith published an edition of three thousand copies. The number nearly corresponds to the number of the Roman Catholic priesthood in Ireland, (for it would not seem to be intended that the laity should have much concern with it,) and the undertaking was a serious one in point of expense. At the rate at which the book sells, the whole value was nearly £6000—a sum which it is not likely a Dublin bookseller would have staked, even in part, on a work in a dead language, had he not been aware that he had the high sanction of the Roman Catholic bishops, and that their recommendation would ensure its sale among the clergy.

But there is a *second* and important statement, for which we are indebted to Mr. Coyne. In the course of twenty-five years Dens had become very

rare and scarcely to be met with; a new edition was called for in 1832, and, in reference to this edition, and as a great recommendation of it, Mr. Coyne states in his Catalogue—

“That inasmuch as his Grace Dr. Murray, Dr. Doyle, Dr. Keating, and Dr. Kinsella have made it their conference book for the clergy of the province of Leinster, the publishers, as well to obviate the difficulty experienced by them in procuring the work, as well as also to advance the cause of religion and morality in the other parts of the Irish Church, is induced to reprint a limited number of copies.”

This limited number was another edition of three thousand, another risk of £6000—no mean proof surely of the importance of the work. Mr. Coyne states that an eighth volume, containing supplementary matter, is added, “with the sanction and approbation of his Grace the Most Reverend Dr. Murray,” the Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin. Here are two most important facts; first, that the bishops of Leinster adopted Dens as their conference book, and, second, that the additional volume was specially sanctioned by Dr. Murray; so that the *whole* book bears the stamp of the highest authority. The simple statement of so intelligent and trustworthy a witness as Mr. Coyne, were quite sufficient in proof of the facts alleged, the more especially as that statement has been before the Irish priesthood for several years, and has met with no denial; but we can appeal to evidence which fully bears out his representation, and that of the most direct and independent kind. There is a book annually published in Ireland, of the highest authority, under the sanction of the archbishop of Dublin, and of indispensable use to the priesthood, called the “Priest’s Directory.” In this book it is stated that there is to be a conference held among the priests four times a-year, upon certain questions proposed to them by their prelates: the priests are required to inform themselves of the standard principles of their Church in answer to these questions. Now, in perfect accordance with the statements of Mr. Coyne, it is found, on turning to the Priest’s Directories for the years 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834, and 1835, that the questions proposed for discussion in the province of Leinster are all taken from Dens in consecutive order; nay, it is found, on examination, that when Dr. Murray was simply a bishop, the questions which were proposed for conference among the clergy of his diocese, and signed with his own name, for 1825, and several succeeding years, were all taken from Dens’ Theology, though not in regular order.\*

It is no answer to this to say, as has been said by Dr. Murray and his friends, that some of the sentiments of Dens are obsolete and they do not receive them, and that, though Dens furnished the questions, this does not show that they approved of his answers. The reply to this is, that there is no caution introduced against certain sentiments of Dens as unsound or antiquated, no reprobation pronounced upon what is hateful and atrocious—and that the Church of Rome, unlike other churches, is in the constant habit of condemning not only books, but *parts*, of books, where she considers them objectionable. Thus from Burghs Hibernia Dominicana, ten pages are taken away in most of the copies. Dens, however, as a whole, receives the full sanction of the Romish Prelates of Ireland—the sanction of their unanimous approval as a book to be republished—and the sanction of part of their number, the Bishops of Leinster, as a book to be used in conference, without one word of doubt or warning. Did any church-court in Scotland treat a book in the same way, could there be a moment’s hesitation as to its undoubted authority, or would the public fail to hold the members of that court responsible for the sentiments of the book? And, as to the alleged distinction between the questions and the answers—this does not affect the approbation of the book in whole by the bishops,

\* Vide Report of London Meeting, pages 41—45.

and more than this, if it were not intended that the answers of Dens should be believed and followed—if the book were only to be used as supplying questions, what need was there to publish two editions of the whole large work of eight volumes? a few pages of questions would have been all that was necessary. Besides, what sort of a “Guide” would Dens be, if he merely asked questions? Moreover, it is notorious that the Roman Catholic priesthood are not left to the exercise of private judgment—to think what they please on theological subjects—that the Church has a standard of doctrine; and where should that standard be found, if not in the appointed text books of her students, the conference books of her priests? As to the eighth volume of Dens, in the dedication which is addressed to Dr. Murray, and which, with a few exceptions, was torn out of the copies sent to London, as if to destroy an important link in the evidence, the approbation of the archbishop is strongly expressed. It is said, that the work was “undertaken with his approbation;” *and some of the most obnoxious sentiments are to be found in that volume!* Besides, Mr. Coyne expressly states, that “the supplementary matter above referred to, has been added *with the sanction and approbation of his Grace the Most Reverend Dr. Murray.*”

Here we have the clearest evidence that Dens’ Theology is an authorized text book in the Roman Catholic Church of Ireland; that for twenty-seven years it has received the sanction of the highest ecclesiastical authority. And were further evidence necessary, it would be found in the statements of the Rev. Messrs. Croly and Nolan, the latter of whom recently withdrew from the Romish Church. Both declare that it is a standard book of reference, and seem to wonder that any doubt should be entertained as to a fact so notorious. Farther evidence would be furnished in the remarkable circumstance, that when the Rev. Mr. M’Ghee offered to prove the authority of Dens before a committee of the House of Commons, though a majority of the committee were Roman Catholics, four of them eminent barristers, with Mr. O’Connell at their head, the offer was declined; any examination of Mr. O’Sullivan which took place, consisting of a studious avoidance of the subject. It might also be mentioned, that repeated calls—no less than six—have been made upon the most eminent members of the Romish Church, clerical and lay, to come forward, suitably authorized, and disprove the standard character of Dens; and though full time and every facility have been afforded them—though they have the strongest interest in denying his authority, and it would be very easy to set it aside if unreal—and though many evidently feel the unhappy position in which they are placed very keenly—yet not one of them has yet stood forward publicly in vindication of the character of his church. It may be added in conclusion, that any attempts at explanation which have been made by Archbishop Murray and his secretary, Mr. Woods, leave the great facts of the case where they were before; that the most important are admitted; and that the increased inquiry which has been excited, has only served to bring out additional evidence in behalf of the standard authority of Dens, and to prove the Jesuitry of those who have been educated in his school.

II. Having established the authority of Dens’ Theology, as a book authorized by the Roman Catholic prelates of Ireland, we now come, secondly, to mention a very few of its principles. Many imagine that Popery has changed and improved of late years. It may have done so in outward profession; but the following facts will show, that in reality it remains, what a religion with an infallible head must always do—the same.

According to Dens,\* the Roman Catholic priesthood are not bound to

\* Den’s Theology, Vol. ii. pp. 290—2.



obey the civil law if it infringes on what they consider their ecclesiastical immunities. Nor are they always bound by the laws of truth: "He who denies himself to be a priest when he really is one, only tells a MERE OFFICIAL LIE."\* According to the same authority, the first remedy for a "scrupulous conscience," of which conviction of sin and anxiety about the way of everlasting safety is one indication, is "a humble and BLIND obedience to the priest;"—a priest educated in the theology of Dens; and without this blind obedience, it is declared, that all other remedies are unavailing!—of course, meditation and prayer are useless! Again, on the same authority, we are taught that the obligation of a promise ceases "when, before the promise is fulfilled, the circumstances become so changed that the person promising, had he foreseen these circumstances, would never have made the promise."† This is also true, although "the promise should be confirmed by an oath, because an oath may be considered to be taken under the same exceptions under which a promise has been made." Again: "a vow or oath itself is *taken away* or relaxed by the superiors of the church IN THE PLACE OF GOD, and so the obligation thence arising spontaneously ceases by the removal of the matter!"‡ What will the people of Scotland say to such doctrines on the subject of promises and oaths? Where is the comfort of domestic and social life—the safety of property—the stability of the State—the authority of the Bible—if men may get promises or oaths relaxed and taken away as often as they themselves think circumstances sufficiently changed to warrant, or the superiors of the church are kind enough to grant them a release IN THE PLACE OF GOD? I might mention the horrid profligacy, the revolting obscenity with which Dens abounds. Under certain heads, questions are asked, and revelations made so monstrous, that it is well the book is written in Latin. Indeed, we are bold to say, that no priest, corrupted, as he may be, would dare to translate some chapters into English! But we pass on to the doctrine of Dens, on the case of heretics. These consist of all professing Christianity who are not comprehended in the bosom of the Church of Rome. It is declared, that heretics are worse than Jews or Pagans, and that the religious "rites of heretics are not in themselves to be tolerated; because they are so bad, that no truth or utility can from thence be derived to the good of the church, except, however that some greater evils might accrue from some other source, or some greater good be prevented;" plainly teaching that the Church of Rome tolerates the religious rites of the Protestants of this country only until she has the power and the prospect of successfully putting them down. The sentiment is repeated in still stronger language. He says, § of liberty of conscience or religion, "that it is *certainly false and condemned*. Whence it is not to be tried or approved, but EXTIRPATED, unless there may be some prudential reasons which may induce us to tolerate." Farther: he declares, that in consequence of baptism, all, to whatever Protestant communion they may belong, are subjects of the Romish Church, "and therefore, the church has jurisdiction over them, and the power of *compelling* them *by ordinary means* to obedience"—that they are no more released from her laws "than subjects rebelling against their lawful prince are released from the laws of that prince"—that they "can be compelled, by CORPOREAL PUNISHMENTS, to return to the Catholic faith and the unity of the church"—that such punishments as confiscation of goods, transportation, imprisonment, &c. may justly be applied—that "because forgers of money, or other disturbers of the state, ARE JUSTLY PUNISHED WITH DEATH, therefore, ALSO HERETICS, who are forgers of the faith, and, as experience testifies, grievously disturb the state," should be put to death; that "meantime, however,

\* Den's Theology, Vol. ii. p. 65.

† Vol. iii. p. 297.

‡ Vol. ii. p. 272.

it is not always expedient that the church should use this right\* of compulsion.

Such is the merest sample of the moral and religious tenets of one of the recognised authorities of the Roman Catholic Church of Ireland. And what would the Protestants of Scotland think of such tenets being taught and put into operation in this country? How would they bear a revival of the days of popish persecution?—persecution not arising out of a strange and accidental combination of circumstances, with which all religious parties have been chargeable; but persecution on standard principle—persecution as the rule whenever there is the power. Let no one say that these are obsolete opinions, and that the Roman Catholic bishops disclaim them on oath. We have seen what is the value of an oath in the mouth of a Roman Catholic in certain circumstances. The College of Louvain, of which Dens was a professor, in answer to the inquiries of Mr. Pitt, indignantly disclaimed intolerant and anti-social sentiments, and yet, the same College had, but fourteen years before, adopted and approved the Theology of Dens as a standard! And Dens himself was ALIVE, and one of its members, at the very time that Mr. Pitt's questions were proposed and indignantly answered! It is well known that the bishops have the strongest motive, for the credit of their church and the success of their schemes, in disclaiming such sentiments at the present time. But against their oaths we place their practice; their recommendation of Dens, and regular systematic use of his work among their clergy, not a great many years ago, but *at the present day*; and, moreover, we appeal to the remarkable fact, that the conferences which have been held of late years in Leinster, among the Roman Catholic clergy, by the appointment of their bishops, have not been directed to such doctrines as the Perfections of God or the Trinity, which are great acknowledged truths—these were passed over, though standing first in the order of Dens, and the conferences were directed to such a doctrine as *the treatment of heretics*, as if designedly preparing the priesthood, and through them the people, for those sad and miserable days which await the Protestants of Ireland, unless the Protestants of Britain arouse to their rescue.

And what is the moral and religious condition of Ireland, under the dissemination of such sentiments as those of Dens? It is just what might have been expected. The fruit is the native product of so poisonous a tree. The immense influence of the Roman Catholic priesthood is acknowledged on all hands. Were that influence sound or pure, under the direction of correct principles, or a christian spirit, the moral aspects of the country should be fair and beautiful. But what is the fact? It is a fact that lying and perjury, violence and persecution, and crime, prevail to a fearful extent. It appears from the First Parliamentary Report of the poor in Ireland, 1830, that the commitments for perjury in Ireland are nearly *three times* greater than the same commitments in England, and that though the population of England be nearly double that of Ireland. The other year the Attorney-General of Ireland, at the assizes of Kilkenny, was obliged to adjourn the trials, on the express ground that, owing to the refusal of witnesses to come forward and give evidence, owing to the prevalence of false testimony, and also the perjury of jurors, justice could not be done, even in cases of the most cold-blooded murder. Within the last year there have been 187 dreadful murders perpetrated in one county, and, owing to the same causes, of all these only one criminal has been brought to justice. What but such a theology as Dens', wrought out in the hands of a powerful priesthood to their own purposes, could lead to such results as these? The connection between the Roman Catholic priesthood and the melancholy manifestations to which we allude, will be evident when we consider that the late Dr. Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, authorized the Rhemish Testament, in which we find such a note as the following: "Though Pilate was much more innocent than the



Jews, and would have been free from the murder of our Saviour, seeking all the means that he could (without offending the people and the Emperor's laws) to dismiss him, yet he is damned for being the minister of the people's wicked will, against his own conscience. *Even as all officers are, and especially the judges and juries who execute laws for temporal princes against Catholic men, for all such are guilty of innocent blood, and are nothing excused by that they execute other men's will, according to the laws, which are unjust, for they should rather suffer death themselves, than put an innocent man to death.*" It is well known that the great hinderance to the spread of scriptural knowledge in Ireland, arises from the Roman Catholic priesthood. This is the uniform and oft-repeated testimony of all the excellent Societies which are labouring to provide the Irish with the word of God and a Bible education. The most fearful curses, sometimes to the extent of 100,000, are denounced against the Scripture readers from the altar, and against all who encourage them. Very many of them have been waylaid, abused, beaten, and not less than *four* of them have been murdered; a *fifth*, so lately as last month, all but murdered. And for what? not on account of any resistance to illegal exactions, but simply because they laboured to diffuse the light of Protestantism, agreeably to the requirements, and in the spirit of the Bible.\* In the province of Ulster, where the great body of the Protestants reside, and where of course the Roman Catholics are restrained, and in some respects improved, by their presence—it is stated on the authority of the Rev. Mr. O'Sullivan, that though its population be more than a *fourth* of the whole population of Ireland, the military which it requires amounts only to a *twelfth* of the whole employed in that country. It is stated also, on the authority of Sir H. Vivian, from returns made up by military officers in 1832, that while the crime of Leinster and Connaught is rated at 349 and 617 respectively, that of Ulster rates so low as 14. Indeed, at the assizes of Antrim, one of the counties of Ulster, there were the other year no criminals for trial at all, so that the judge received white gloves, the token of a maiden assize. It is remarkable too, that in the same county the Sunday scholars are to the whole population as 1 to 10; while in the Roman Catholic county of Kilkenny they are only as 1 to 221, in Kerry as 1 to 432, and in Clare as 1 to 844.†

And now, having seen the true and unchanging character of Popery from facts, as well as from the authoritative statements of Dens' Theology, what is the duty of every professed Protestant? Is it not, while he feels and manifests the tenderest compassion for his Roman Catholic brethren, to resist the Popish system, by all legitimate and scriptural means, to the uttermost, wherever it may manifest itself in this country; and to be not less faithful and at every sacrifice prepared to protect his Protestant brethren in Ireland, and deliver the Roman Catholic population from its dreadful bondage? Let none say—this is an enlightened age, there is no fear of Popery. Popery, as history proves, is most flexible and insidious, and can adapt itself, without changing its principles, to all states of society. Its friends know well that it would ruin their cause to present it in its naked deformity, and so affect liberality and improvement, and freedom, civil and religious. It is at this moment making progress in the most free and enlightened nations of the earth, while it seems losing its hold in other countries; and when it has acquired the power, who can doubt it will assimilate all to its own spirit and likeness. Let none say, that Protestant associations will do no good, that they are uncharitable, and will only excite religious dissension. It is our imperative duty in all cases to make use of means for the resistance and overthrow of error, and the establishment of truth. This is a duty which we owe

\* Vide extracts from the Bible Society's Correspondence, Nov. 1831.

† Vide Speech of the Rev. Mr. Foote before the Irish Society.

to ourselves, and our families, and our country; as we value the temporal blessings with which Providence has favoured us, and which we owe to our enslaved Roman Catholic brethren; as we value their immortal welfare, and would exercise towards them true christian charity. Religious peace is too dearly purchased which is bought at the expense of the welfare of our land and the souls of men, and the honour of God, and is but paying the way for a more terrible war should Popery gain the ascendancy. The charity which teaches us to think lightly of great religious errors, of superstition and idolatry, is most derogatory to the truth of Heaven—pours contempt on the gospel way of salvation—condemns the faithful contendings of our martyred ancestors—destroys the grand motives to the diffusion of true religion, and under the guise of kindness and good-will, is chargeable with the grossest cruelty to the unhappy victims of religious delusion themselves. Will the Protestants of Scotland, whatever may be their other differences, political or religious, undo the work of their fathers, barter away blessings bought with the prayers and the blood of martyrs, and suffer Popery, under the mask of friendship, to trample on all that is dearest to them, rob them of their liberties, civil and sacred, and substitute in their schools and churches the Theology of Dens for the Word of the living God? and all for what! for the indulgence of a false peace and a criminal liberality—for the gratification of a political prejudice, or religious party spirit. We cannot believe that Protestantism has yet sunk so low in a land once famed for the triumph of its principles. Let all sound-hearted men, then, seriously consider the true character of Popery. Let them remember the awful language which is applied to it in the Scriptures of truth—that it is **ANTICHRIST**, or the grand enemy of Christ—the **MYSTERY OF INIQUITY**—the **MAN OF SIN**—**BABYLON THE GREAT**—the **MOTHER OF HARLOTS** and **ABOMINATIONS** of the **EARTH**—**BLASPHEMY**. Let them remember the doom which is denounced against it—that it is not to be changed or reformed, but destroyed—that its destruction is to be most tremendous, involving all who countenance and support it into a participation of its plagues; and that the heavens and the earth, and more especially the martyred saints of God, are called to rejoice in its destruction. Let all professing Protestants measure Popery, not by the standard of a weak and infidel latitudinarianism, but by the standard of truth—by the word of the **Infallible God** by whom all shall one day be judged. Let them rally without delay round the Protestant Associations of Scotland, and make them strong by their labours, and contributions, and prayers. And the greater the criminality of the system against which they contend, and the more awful the doom of its adherents, let this only serve to make their compassion the more intense, and their exertions the more unwearied. And for encouragement, let them remember, that though Popery should again rise to power in this land, its reign will be short; that its days are numbered in the book of prophecy; and that great will be the honour and reward of those who are successful in counter-working and overthrowing, even in its most refined forms, that master-piece of Satan which has prostrated the truth of God, and tyrannized over the dearest interests and hopes of man through revolving centuries.

*N. B. For fuller information on the subject, and for the authority on which the above statements are chiefly made, the reader is referred to the Reports of the great Protestant meeting in London—to the Report of the meeting at Hereford—and to the letter by the Rev. Mr. McGhee, to the Protestants of the United Kingdom. The Reader is earnestly requested to procure the above, and consult the authorities carefully for himself.*

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